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Tarık Oğuzlu

Turkey and the west

The rise of Turkey-centric westernism

This article argues that Turkey's approach towards its western partners, meaning the United States and the European Union, has recently evolved into Turkey-centric westernism. Contrary to the argument that Turkey has begun to turn its face away from the west under the Justice and Development party (AKP) governments since 2002, this article contends that what has changed in Turkey's approach towards the west is not Turkey's commitment to successfully complete its western-friendly transformation process at home and abroad, but the decades-old fixation with the idea that membership in western institutions, most notably the European Union, is a must for this to happen. Turkey is also less concerned that its western and European identity be recognized by western/European countries themselves.

Turkey-centric westernism questions the idea that Turkey is a mere tool for the materialization of western security interests in other locations. Rather, Turkey is an actor on its own. A more interest-based, rather than identity-related, approach is in place, but, in addition, Ankara is now more self-confident than ever in its dealing with western actors. The most

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notable manifestation of this Turkey-centric westernism is that Turkey has increasingly adopted a more self-centric approach in its foreign policy, while simultaneously undertaking a western/European transformation at home and working towards the creation of a new regional environment in its neighbourhood, particularly the Middle East, in conformity with the constitutive principles and norms of western/European international society. Turkey has now become a country that very much upholds western/European values and employs western/European tools and style in its foreign policy, yet increasingly justifies such practices in the context of its national interests.

This article argues that such an outcome in its foreign policy is mainly a product of Turkey's successful economic performance and political democratization, as well as the so-called strategic-depth foreign policy doctrine of the governing party. A related argument is that the changing dynamics of international-systemic and regional politics in the post 9/11 era have provided the impetus for such a turn in Turkish foreign policy. Put another way, exogenous factors occurring at international and regional levels have simply provided the context in which Turkey's bargaining power vis-à-vis western actors has increased and Turkey has been able to adopt a more nationalistic and self-centric foreign and security policy outlook. Turkish decision-makers have increasingly noted the negative consequences of some western—read American—policies in the Middle East on Turkey's national interests, and have gradually arrived at the conclusion that adopting a long-term transformative foreign policy in this region, similar to EU's neighbourhood policies, would best serve Turkey's interests.

The article proceeds, first, with a description of Turkey-centric westernism, including its constitutive principles and an empirical demonstration of this approach. Then it analyzes the causes of the approach, and the conclusion recaps the main findings of the research and offers some predictions for the future.

TURKEY-CENTRIC WESTERNISM

Principles

Observers in recent years have increasingly noticed that Turkey has begun to adopt a new approach towards the west, namely Turkey-centric westernism. In this view, Turkey does not dispute the constitutive norms of the western-centric international environment, yet it tries to help fix the existing system in such a way as to much better reflect its concerns and priorities at home and abroad. The goal is neither to come up with a particular Turkish model,

mainly in opposition to the west, that might pave the way for Turkey's hegemonic ambitions in the so-called greater Middle Eastern region, nor to achieve a westernized Turkey that puts on western glasses wherever possible.

At the core of Turkey-centric westernism lies the idea that coping with the challenges of the ongoing globalization process requires Turkey to continue its liberal democratic transformation process at home and help develop a friendly strategic environment in its region. Turkey balances its relations with key western actors by strengthening its relations with non-western actors whenever this is considered to be in Turkey's national interests. Rather than automatically following a western route, the continuation of the westernization/Europeanization process has become increasingly hinged on the degree to which this enables Turkey to solve its structural problems at home and contributes to its rise externally.¹

In this view, the westernization process has thus far gained root in Turkey and it would be illogical and impractical to reverse this tide. In the vocabulary of historical sociology, one could talk about the existence of a path dependency in Turkey's relations with the west.² Dating back to the late Ottoman era, the westernization process has now fully become one of the constitutive characters of Turkey's nation-state identity.³ Each particular stage of this process appears to have been built on the gains of the previous ones. Despite all the troubles and conjectural obstacles along the way, the process has continued and Turkey has grown closer to the west than ever.

Turkey's efforts to join the EU, on the one hand, and investment in the strategic relationship with the United States and NATO, on the other, continue. However, in contrast to the past, Turkey now wants to make sure that it sits in the driver's seat. While the pace of EU-related reforms at home has been increasingly subjected to the degree of Turkey's digestion and absorption capacity, strategic cooperation with western actors appears to hinge on the existence of common interests.⁴

1 Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's zero problems foreign policy," *Foreign Policy*, 20 May 2010, www.foreignpolicy.com.

2 Isa Camyar and Halil Mustafa Tagma, "Why does Turkey seek European Union membership? A historical institutional approach," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 2010): 371-86.

3 Kivanc Ulusoy, "The changing challenge of Europeanization to politics and governance in Turkey," *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 4 (2009): 363-84.

4 Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's foreign policy vision: An assessment of 2007," *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 1 (2008): 77-96.

Turkish decision-makers have gradually embraced a Turkey-centric world view whereby contributing to the transformation of the so-called weak and failed states in Turkey's environment in the image of western liberal-plural-democratic norms is now seen to be vital for Turkey's security interests. Similar to the foreign policy practices of the European Union, Turkey has begun to pursue a transformative foreign policy in its region whose fundamental premises are to contribute to regional integration and interdependence.⁵

While continuing to develop strategic and cooperative relations with non-western countries, Turkey takes the utmost care to make sure that such relations are not inimical to western interests. Similar to China's "peaceful rise/peaceful development" strategy, Turkey tries to contribute to the emergence of a friendly regional environment through the adoption of soft-power tools. However, unlike China, Turkey is not waiting for the day it feels confident enough to help institutionalize a non-western political and economic order. Adopting free-market economy and liberal democracy on the one hand and fostering interdependent relations with the key western actors on the other are considered to be vital for the success of Turkey's developmental strategy.

It is without any doubt that the coming to power of the AKP has played a decisive role in the strengthening of this approach. The strategic-depth doctrine of the governing party envisages an independent foreign policy agency on the part of Turkey and puts its relations with the west on a more equal footing while simultaneously prioritizing the emergence of a Turkey-friendly regional environment in the image of western norms.

According to this doctrine, Turkey has the responsibility to help put its region in order. This is the mission Turkey inherited from the Ottoman empire. Though the fulfilment of this mission would likely serve Turkey's realpolitik security concerns, the idea that Turkey needs to fulfil a particular historical mission is very much idea-politik. "Zero problems with the neighbours" might appear to be a realpolitik calculation of how to achieve regional stability, yet it is also the ideational and visionary foreign policy strategy that Turkey should pursue in order to help resurrect the pax-Ottomanica.⁶

5 Kemal Kirisci, "The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 40 (2009): 29-57.

6 Bulent Aras and Aylin Gorener, "National role conceptions and foreign policy orientations: The ideational basis of the Justice and Development party's foreign

The historical mission that Turkey inherited from the Ottoman empire cannot be implemented by pursuing a one-dimensional, in this case pro-western, reactive, and passive foreign policy. Strategic-depth doctrine foresees an independent/visionary/order-creating role for Turkey. In the words of Davutoglu, Turkey should be seen as an actor rather than an issue.⁷ Turkey should be concerned with what happens in the former territories of the Ottoman empire and get involved in disputes between the former subjects of the empire.

Turkey should not define its role as helping fulfil the strategic interests of extra-regional powers. Adopting a Turkey-centric foreign policy with multi-directionalism and multi-dimensionalism as its main characteristics is the only way for Turkey to act true to its history and to become a "normal" country.⁸ Turkey is rich in terms of its culture and links to other people, society, religion, geographical location, and religion. Making use of them through diplomatic, multinational, and regional mechanisms and tools is what is needed to fulfil this historical mission.

According to the strategic-depth doctrine, the EU should represent the successful merger of different civilizations and cultures in a secular fashion so as to become an example of unity in diversity.⁹ Turkey's mission should be to help transform the EU from inside. Interestingly, the AKP leadership disputes Turkey's traditional modernization process and argues that Turkey's potential membership in the EU should not suggest Turkey's assimilation to the European civilization or modernization project. Islam and Turkey's Ottoman legacy are as important and influential as Turkey's westernization process in terms of defining its national identity and foreign policy orientation. Turkey neither is in an overt rivalry with western actors nor should invest too much capital in the recognition of its western/European identity by the west. Rather, Turkey's links to the west would be beneficial for the materialization of its interests in the east. Similarly, the strategic-depth doctrine sees Turkey's eastern connections as leverage in its dealings

policy activism in the Middle East," *Journal of Balkan and Near East Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 73-92.

7 "A special report on Turkey: The Davutoglu effect," *Economist*, 21 October 2010, www.economist.com.

8 Alexandar Murinson, "The strategic depth doctrine of Turkish foreign policy," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (November 2006): 945-64.

9 Hasan Kosebalaban, "The permanent 'other'? Turkey and the question of European identity," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (2007): 87-111.

with the west.¹⁰ Turkey's active participation in the "alliance of civilizations" initiative of the United Nations can be interpreted through this prism.¹¹

The stress on agency is very much affected by the increases in Turkey's economic and military power capabilities compared to its western partners and neighbours. Turkey is now the 17th-largest economy in the world and its national economy has been growing by six to eight percent annually over the last decade. Turkey is a member of the G20, an international platform that brings together the most developed 20 economies all over the world. Turkey also has the second-largest army within NATO and spends on average four percent of its national wealth on military expenditures, a ratio much above the NATO average. The Turkish army also has sophisticated military capabilities, such as the ability to refuel in the air and to deploy a substantial number of soldiers into war zones in short notice.

Turkey-centric westernism also reflects the growing consensus among Turkish business elites that continued economic development increasingly requires that Turkey have access to various markets for its manufactured goods as well as attract global investors to set up business ventures in Turkey.¹² The rise of an Anatolian bourgeoisie is noteworthy in this context, for these circles are not only behind the rise of the AKP in Turkish politics but are also ardent supporters of Turkey's continuing efforts to enlarge its economic horizons beyond the west.¹³ To these prospering economic elites an economy-based multidirectional/multidimensional foreign policy is the only game in town. They are also cognizant of the fact that nearly half of Turkey's trade is with the west, and mainly the EU, and that Turkey owes its economic success to the strengthening and implementation of the free-market oriented liberal economic philosophy.

Demonstration

What are examples of Turkey acting on the premises of Turkey-centric westernism? The answer to this question can be found for both internally and

¹⁰ Ahmet Sozen, "Paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy: Transition and challenges," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2010): 103-23.

¹¹ Ali Balci and Nebi Mis, "Turkey's role in the alliance of civilization: A new perspective in Turkish foreign policy," *Turkish Studies* 9, no. 3 (2008): 387-406.

¹² Ziya Onis, "Beyond the 2001 financial crisis: The political economy of the new phase of neo-liberal restructuring in Turkey," *Review of International Political Economy* 16, no. 3 (2009).

¹³ Mustafa Sen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism and the rise of the Justice and Development party," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 1 (March 2010): 59-84.

externally. Despite the fact that Euro-skepticism and anti-Americanism have recently increased in Turkey, the country's liberal democratic transformation alongside the EU accession process has continued unabated. This process makes itself particularly apparent with regard to solve the structural Kurdish problem. The argument that this problem can only be solved by increasing the quality of pluralist democracy at home has had greater resonance.¹⁴ That the AKP government initiated the so-called democratic (Kurdish) opening in late 2009 is a prime example of Turkey's determination to find a solution to the issue by strengthening liberal democracy.¹⁵ The reforms made in the constitution and other realms, particularly in the area of civil-military relations, testify to the growing degree of westernization and Europeanization. In addition, the practice of renaming potential security issues as "political issues" has gained strength, as the process of desecuritization has gradually taken root in parallel to the Europeanization process.

Turkey's foreign policy has in recent years become more Europeanized and westernized than ever despite the counter argument that Turkey has gradually grown away from the west. On close inspection, it becomes clear that in terms of style, process, and outcome, Turkish foreign policy has lately become more European than ever.

In terms of style, Turkey has begun to speak softly; to prioritize economic, diplomatic, and soft-power tools over military and hard-power ones; to use regional and multinational settings to air its views; to contribute to the settlement of regional disputes by helping to create regional consciousnesses and interdependencies; to play facilitative roles in the solution of regional problems through active third-party roles; to mediate between western actors and Iran; and to urge the countries in the greater Middle Eastern region to accelerate their liberalization and democratization processes.¹⁶ The messages Turkish leaders have begun to give to their counterparts in the Middle East

¹⁴ Alper Kaliber and Nathalie Tocci, "Civil society and the transformation of Turkey's Kurdish question," *Security Dialogue* 41, no. 2 (2010): 191-215; Laman Tasch, "The EU enlargement policy and national majority-minority dynamics in potential European Union members: The example of Turkey," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21, no. 2 (spring 2010): 18-46.

¹⁵ Cuma Cicek, "Elimination or integration of pro-Kurdish politics: Limits of the AKP's democratic initiative," *Turkish Studies* 12, no. 1 (2011): 15-26.

¹⁶ Meliha Altunışık and Esra Çuhadar, "Turkey's search for a third-party role in Arab-Israeli conflicts: Neutral facilitator a principled power mediator," *Mediterranean Politics* 15, no. 3 (2010): 371-92; Kemal Kirisci, "Turkey's foreign policy in turbulent times," *Chailot Paper* 92, European Union Institute for Security Studies, September 2006.

are western-friendly. Turkey's adoption of a transformative foreign policy in its neighbourhood, aiming at institutionalizing interstate relations within regional platforms and increasing interdependent economic, social, and political interactions is very much European in essence. Signing free-trade agreements with neighbours, fostering transnational linkages, and investing in public diplomacy are particular examples that suggest that Turkish foreign policy has already become Europeanized and desecuritized.¹⁷

Turkey's reactions to the so-called Arab spring also reveal that Turkey-centric westernism was already underway. Though it is still too early to chart a true description of Turkey's response to the ongoing uprisings across the Middle East, it would be appropriate to underline that Turkey has eventually sided with the demonstrators in many countries and increasingly urged incumbent regimes to meet people's demands in a satisfactory manner. Unlike Egypt and Tunisia, Turkey's support to the demonstrators in Libya and Syria came belatedly, yet the messages of Turkish leaders have remained the same throughout: rulers should be accountable to the public; legitimacy and sovereignty should germinate from elections and rulers' capability to meet public demands; a liberal-democratic transformation is needed to integrate the whole area into the global political-economic system; when rulers fail to provide their people with security and prosperity, it is legitimate for the international community to take on the responsibility to protect those who continue to suffer.¹⁸

Such messages are very much western and European in essence and simultaneously reflect Turkish thinking that Turkey should from now on prioritize human rights in neighbouring countries and actively contribute to the democratization of the Middle East. It is noteworthy in this context that this European stance on the Arab spring has been directly informed by Turkey's internal transformation along the same principles, as well as Turkey's increasing power capabilities and security needs. Turkey's responses to the Arab spring, as it has unfolded to date, reveal that Turkish foreign policy has begun to operate with a successful combination of ideal/moral-politik and realpolitik factors. Turkey has been asking its neighbours to the south to transform into democracies, which denotes the growing

17 Bulent Aras and Rabiya Karakaya Polat, "From conflict to cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey's relations with Syria and Iran," *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 5 (2008): 495-515.

18 "Turkey will not stand by the wrongdoing in Syria," *Today's Zaman*, 19 June 2011, www.todayszaman.com.

impact of Turkey's internal transformation—and specifically, its identity—on its foreign policy. At the same time, this stance reflects the realpolitik calculation that Turkey's national security interests would be much better served were the region to transform in the image of the norms that have long been shaping Turkey's internal transformation. It will be increasingly difficult for Turkey to justify its cooperation with countries whose regimes violate the fundamental rights of their people and fail the democracy test.

In terms of process, elected civilians are now more active and influential than appointed bureaucrats, particularly in the military, in making decisions, and in defining the ends and means of Turkey's national interests. The most appropriate examples to mention in this context include Turkey's changing policies on the Cyprus dispute and the Kurds of northern Iraq.¹⁹ That Turkey is now trying to achieve peace with its past, identity, and neighbours also testifies to the strengthening of civilianization in the decision-making process.

And finally, as far as outcome is concerned, Turkey's foreign policy choices and actions in its neighbourhood are increasingly convergent with the policies of western actors. The recent disagreements between Turkey and the United States on Israel and Iran do not negate this fact.²⁰ Turkey supports the transformation of its neighbourhood in the image of western norms; encourages membership of these countries in international organizations; supports strategic cooperation with Russia and its long-term liberal transformation; and sees the solution of the Arab-Israeli dispute as vital for regional stability as well as to defeat radical religious terrorism.

Turkey's relations with the United States either bilaterally or within NATO also reveal a similar picture. Despite the fact that these two countries have in the recent past disagreed on such issues as regime change in Iraq,

19 Ayse Aslihan Celenk, "The restructuring of Turkey's policy towards Cyprus: The Justice and Development party's struggle for power," *Turkish Studies* 8, no. 3 (September 2007): 349-63.

20 At first glance, Turkey's embrace of Hamas and strong criticism of Israel in recent years might suggest that it stands in opposition to the United States. However, on closer inspection it becomes clear that Turkey is not alone in this context and that almost all countries on earth, including the US, have intensified their criticism of Israel's policies, particularly in the aftermath of operation *Cast Lead* in late 2008; that the US and other western countries have begun to change their attitudes towards Hamas in such a way as to help incorporate it into the negotiation process; and that Turkey and Israel have now increased their efforts to mend fences following the infamous flotilla crisis in May 2010.

the future of Iraqi Kurds, the presence of PKK terrorists in northern Iraq, the rise of Iran's regional influence, the incorporation of Syria and Hamas into the international community, the future of the Arab-Israeli dispute, the enlargement of NATO to Ukraine and Georgia, the NATOization of the Black Sea region, the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and the institutionalization of missile-defence shield mechanisms within NATO, it would be wrong to argue that Turkey has increasingly adopted anti-American positions and tried to make it unlikely for the US to achieve its goals.²¹ Rather, on close inspection one observes that Turkey has been paying the utmost care not to damage US interests and the two countries could eventually succeed in finding consensus on many issues.

More importantly, Turkey still views NATO as an important guarantee of its security and avoids any attempt to acquire nuclear weapons.²² Even with regard to Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, Turkey has played a facilitator role between Tehran and western capitals and has tried to convince the Iranian regime in move in line with the strategic priorities of the west.²³ Turkey's coming closer to the United States has recently been accelerated by the decision of the Obama administration to draw down the number of US troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as Turkey's acquiescence in the idea that NATO would do well to develop a ballistic missile defence capability in the context of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Besides, membership in the transatlantic alliance still remains one of Turkey's strategic priorities. Despite the fact that the latest transatlantic survey of the German Marshall Fund finds the degree of anti-westernism increasing in Turkey, it has continued to participate in NATO's out-of-area missions and to support the transformation of the alliance in functional and geographical terms.²⁴ What appears to have changed, however, in the context of Turkish-American relations is Turkey's automatic alliance-driven following of US

21 Gilles Andreani, "Turkey, Europe and the United States in a multipolar world," German Marshall fund of the United States, Mediterranean policy program, 11 June 2010.

22 Mustafa Kibaroglu, "Reassessing the role of US nuclear weapons in Turkey," *Arms Control Today*, June 2010, 8-13.

23 Mark Fitzpatrick, "Iran: The fragile promise of the fuel-swap plan," *Survival* 52, no. 3 (June-July 2010): 67-94.

24 "Transatlantic trends survey," German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2010, www.gmfus.org.

leadership. Rather, Ankara's cooperation with Washington has increasingly hinged on the extent to which it contributes to Turkey's national security interests.

Similarly, Turkey's growing relations with such rising powers as Brazil, Russia, India, and China, and openings to Africa and South America, do not denote Turkey's intentions to form anti-western coalitions, but rather reflect its desire to take advantage of emerging global realities in political, military, and economic realms. Turkey is not the only country preparing itself for an emerging post-western world. Western countries have also engaged in similar policies.²⁵

The growing salience of Turkey-centrism can also be detected in the Turkish perception that the European Union has turned into a myopic strategic actor in the post-Cold War era that focuses mainly on internal EU developments. To Turkish elites, investing in the membership of the central and eastern European countries and strengthening of good governance in Europe's peripheries do not make the EU a strategic actor with a global mindset. In the eyes of Turkish elites, the EU is certainly an economic giant, yet it is still a dwarf in politics and a pigmy in defence. Diverging security rationales among members and the growing renationalization of foreign policy outlooks in key member states militate against the EU's ability to become a credible strategic actor that defines its core security interests and the means to achieve them collectively and convincingly.²⁶ To what extent the Lisbon treaty of December 2007 can help the members overcome such challenges remains an open-ended question. The latest economic crisis also militates against the EU's international leadership. In the view of the Turkish elites, so long as the European Union continues to suffer from economic crises, aging populations, and decreasing defence spending, it will not be able to transform into a credible global actor. Such an EU would not be able to assess Turkey's potential contributions to European security or appreciate Turkey's potential power. This in turn curtails Turkey's willingness to define its future inside the EU.

Turkey's critical stance on the EU has also been informed by the fact that the idea of multiculturalism has become increasingly disputed by such

25 Adam Quinn, "The art of declining politely: Obama's prudent presidency and the waning of American power," *International Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2011): 803-24.

26 Charles A. Kupchan, "The potential twilight of the European Union," Council on Foreign Relations international institutions and global governance program working paper, September 2010.

mainstream European politicians as Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy, and David Cameron in the post-9/11 era.²⁷ As long as Europeans fear the prospect of Europe being transformed into Eurabia, Islamophobic sentiments will run high and immigration from Muslim lands will be seen as a security issue. Similarly, unless Muslims in Europe feel that they belong and are included as European Muslims, the EU's appeal to the Islamic community will diminish and this will negatively affect Turkey's perception of the EU as a powerhouse and magnet.

One of the demonstrative examples of the Turkey-centric approach towards the EU is that Turkey has gradually begun to put more emphasis on developing strategic cooperation with key EU members, rather than treating the EU as an independent international actor on its own. With the exception of the United Kingdom, which has long been a supporter of Turkey's membership, Turkey has signed strategic bilateral agreements with France and Germany. Interestingly, these two countries oppose Turkey's full membership the most yet both recommend that the EU establish a privileged partnership with Ankara. Turkey's efforts to improve relations with Greece on a strategic and bilateral level constitute another example in this vein.

Although growing opposition to Turkey's eventual accession to the union has contributed to the Turkey-centric perspective, this study does not argue that Turkey's growing engagement with the Middle East in recent years has been caused primarily by the EU's rejection of it.²⁸ However, as Europeans question the suitability of Turkey's accession to the EU, many Turks view the Middle East as an alternative strategic destination. The idea is that rather than Turkey's perpetually knocking on the EU's door, it should aspire to become the leading country of the greater Middle Eastern region.²⁹

Turkey no longer indexes its policies solely to the wishes of its western partners, as it has increasingly become clear that Turkey's concerns over its territorial integrity have increased due to particular US policies in the Middle East. For example, Turkey is not happy with the growing prospects of Kurdish independence, or Iran's ability to punch above its weight in the post-Saddam Middle East, or the continuation of the deadlock over the

27 George Friedman, "Germany and the failure of multiculturalism," 2010, www.realclearworld.com.

28 Jürgen Gerhards and Silke Hans, "Why not Turkey? Attitudes towards Turkish membership in the EU among citizens in 27 European countries," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 49, no. 4 (2011): 741-66.

29 Ziya Onis, "The new wave of foreign policy activism in Turkey: Drifting away from Europeanization?" Danish Institute for International Studies report 5, January 2009.

Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Rather than following the western leadership automatically, an increasing number of Turks has begun to believe that policies of Turkey's western partners, wherever they are implemented, may not automatically serve Turkey's security interests.³⁰ They believe that Turkey should play a more assertive role in its region because others' actions and policies in the Middle East now closely affect Turkey's internal developments and national security.

ENABLING FACTORS

Changes at the systemic and regional levels have been important insofar as they have provided the context for Turkey-centric westernism, strengthened Turkey's ability to maneuver in its own region, and raised questions over the merits of following a solely pro-western foreign policy.

The first point to mention in this context is that the changes in the nature of international political order since the end of the Cold War, and more recently since the 11 September 2001 attacks, appear to have enabled such mid-sized powers as Turkey to play more influential and independent roles in their own regions. The Cold War-era practice of following the leadership of alternative power blocks seems to have ended first with the evaporation of bipolarity in the wake of the Soviet Union's demise and then with the emergence of new power centres and areas of strategic exploration over the last decade.

The transition from the strict bipolarity to multipolarity also means that there has occurred a gradual decrease in the power capabilities of Turkey's traditional western partners. It now seems Turkey's western partners no longer possess the mixture of power of coercion and power of attraction that enabled them to maintain their unrivalled leadership in the past. Turkey's value in global politics has been positively affected by the rise of identity politics in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Those who argue that the United States is now a global power in gradual decline underline that it might still be the predominant power on earth but is far from being omnipotent and omnipresent. America's primacy is increasingly questioned, even in military terms, as the American war machine appears to have bogged down in the quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan, typical examples of asymmetric warfare.

³⁰ According to German Marshall Fund's 2010 transatlantic trends survey, the ratio of Turks who want to see Turkey act alone in international politics is around 40 percent. Six percent think that Turkey should side with the US and 13 percent think that Turkey should side with the EU.

To many observers, President Barack Obama has been trying to manage the US's decline in a peaceful and cost-effective manner, first by getting rid of the Wilsonian approach of former President George W. Bush and then developing functional and pragmatic cooperation with emerging and rising powers and traditional allies alike.³¹ The argument is that rather than investing in long-term alliance relationships based on commonality of norms and values, the current US administration has now been employing an offshore balancing strategy, according to which forging interest-based strategic partnerships with pivotal countries in key regions is seen as critical to prevent the rise of potential challengers to American primacy.³² This article contends that the offshore balancing strategy, rather than the strategy of preponderance and domination, tends to make it much easier for such regional powers as Turkey to act in their neighbourhoods more freely.

Turkey's ability to maneuver, in addition to the Turkey-centric approach, appears also to have been accelerated by Obama's approach to the Middle East. The new administration has not only set clear datelines for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan but also given the benefit of the doubt to regional initiatives to help bring Syria and Iran back into the international community.³³ The president has also given up the strategy of forceful democratization from the top-down. Undoubtedly, the prospects of American withdrawal from these countries have not only led Turkish rulers to reflect upon the geopolitical environment that might arise following the US departure but also urged American leaders to improve relations with Turkey in the hope that it could play a stabilizing role in the post-withdrawal age.

Moreover, current American foreign policy understanding appears to have affected the way in which the Turkish-American bilateral relationship has been unfolding in recent years. The gradual decline in America's global position as well as the increase in Turkey's power capabilities seem to have increased Turkey's bargaining power vis-à-vis the US. It has now become less costly for traditional US allies to sometimes pursue independent foreign

31 Pamela Geller, Robert Spencer, and John Bolton, *The Post-American Presidency: The Obama Administration's War on America* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2010). Its "reset" policy with Russia and engagement with the members of the axis of evil are examples of this approach. Relations with the key global actors of Russia, China, Brazil, India, and Japan appear to reflect this new understanding.

32 Adam Quinn, "The art of declining politely: Obama's prudent presidency and the waning of American power," *International Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2010): 803-24.

33 Ibid., 817-22.

policy courses. What makes Turkey's new foreign policy Turkey-centric is that unlike the Cold War era Turkey now feels the burden of entrapment more than the burden of abandonment. The strategic costs of following US leadership in the name of guaranteeing US commitment to Turkey's security appear to have now exceeded the expected payoffs. Turkish leaders increasingly ask how strategic cooperation with the United States might affect Turkey's relations with its neighbours and other centres of power.

A similar situation can be observed in the EU's changing position in global power politics and the impact this appears to have had on Turkey's approach towards the EU. The idea of membership in the EU appears to have lost some of its legitimacy in Turkish eyes over the last years due to many factors, including, importantly, the gradual decline of the EU's global position. Even though the deepening and widening dimensions of the EU's integration process have strengthened since the onset of the post-Cold War era, this does not mean that a concomitant increase has occurred in the EU's global position. Despite the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty and the launching of successful European security and defence missions on the ground, the EU is still far from becoming a single-voice global actor in foreign, defence, and security policy realms.

Its power of attraction—the normative foundations of the EU project—has also come under strong criticism from many directions. For example, the recent economic crisis has put the EU project under serious risk as it has revealed that member-states tend to put their national interests above the so-called common European interests. The European Union has in recent years turned inwards and adopted a low-profile stance abroad, which does not augur well for Turkey's eventual accession.

How the European Union has thus far responded to Turkey's membership aspirations has also profoundly shaped Turkey's perception of the EU. Accession negotiations with Turkey got off the ground in 2005, yet the pace of negotiations has been slow and opposition to Turkey's prospective membership has increased dramatically. The slowing of Turkey's Europeanization process in recent years could be equally attributed to Turkey's political and constitutional crises, but one should certainly take internal EU developments into account—and in particular growing enlargement fatigue—to fully grasp Turkey's resentment towards the EU.³⁴

34 Ömer Taşpınar, "A complacent west could easily face the previously unthinkable question: 'Who lost Turkey?' Turkey's fading dream of Europe," *Current History*, March 2007, 123-29.

In the meanwhile, the ideas of privileged or differentiated membership have become more pronounced in recent years. While the first denotes the qualitative improvement of relations between EU and Turkey, mainly on strategic and foreign policy issues and short of Turkey's full membership, the latter stands for conditional Turkish membership in that the idea is that Turkey would join the EU as a member but continue to remain outside of some policy realms.³⁵ The point worth underlining in this context is that the more the credentials of Turkey's EU membership have been challenged by the Europeans, the more Turkish rulers and society alike have adopted a Turkey-centric view in response. A clear example is that Turkish rulers have now coined a new concept to demonstrate their uneasiness with the EU's lack of political resolve to admit Turkey as a member—the Ankara criteria. The content of the Ankara criteria bears a strong resemblance to the EU's Copenhagen criteria.³⁶ Turkish rulers continue to stress that Turkey needs to transform alongside the liberal-democratic norms of the European Union, yet they simultaneously underline that Turkey should be in the driver's seat of this transformation and should adjust the pace and intensity of such reforms according to its ability to digest them. The concept of the Ankara criteria implicitly suggests that what matters more is Turkey's transformation into a liberal-democratic polity rather than eventual membership in the EU.

Another factor feeding the Turkey-centric approach and boosting Turkey's ability to maneuver in its region is that Russia has been recovering from its strategic retrenchment of the early post-Cold war years while China is asserting itself as the next global hegemon. Many Turks now believe that forging closer strategic cooperation with these countries would not only help Turkey offset its deteriorating relations with the western actors but also have a say in a future post-western world. Some even argue that Turkey has more in common with China and Russia because all three appear to believe that national sovereignty and territorial integrity should remain the most sacred principles of international politics and involvement in other states' internal affairs should be kept to a minimum and subjected to serious limitations.³⁷

35 Heather Grabbe and Sinan Ulgen, "The way forward for Turkey and the EU: A strategic dialogue on foreign policy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2010.

36 Omer Celik, vice-chairman of the Justice and Democracy party in charge of external affairs, suggested that Turkey rename the Copenhagen criteria the Ankara criteria and continue the reform process, Athens, 7 October 2010.

37 John Feffer, "How Turkey is chasing China to become the next big thing," <http://motherjones.com>.

The adoption of the Turkey-centric westernism approach has also been informed by the structural changes taking place at the regional level, particularly in the Middle East, over the last decade. These changes are important insofar as they have contributed to Turkey's security sensitivities and vulnerabilities in a *realpolitik* sense, underlined the need to deal with such challenges with European and western foreign policy tools, and made it clear that Turkey's power of attraction in the Middle East would increasingly become dependent on its institutional links with western actors as well as the continuation of the liberal-democratization process at home.

The first point to mention is that the Middle East has become more Hobbesian than Kantian in the wake of US-led regime change in Iraq. The US military intrusion into the area has increased the possibility of Iraq's dismemberment along communal-ethnic-sectarian lines; boosted Iran's regional influence and contributed to the rise of a Shiite crescent; galvanized regional politics; fuelled anti-western and anti-American feelings; worsened the prospects of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute; and contributed to the polarization of regional politics along different axes, such as the "axis of moderation" versus the "axis of evil."³⁸ Such developments point to the importance of Turkey's minimizing their negative consequence on its national security. Taking proactive and bolder initiatives has increasingly become a *realpolitik* necessity rather than an issue of choice. At stake has not only been the possibility of Turkey's being drawn into the quagmire but also how this might affect the prospects of its EU membership. The fear was that the more Turkey was seen to be part of the Hobbesian Middle East, the more difficult it would be to join the Kantian EU.

Turkey has increasingly adopted European tools and instruments in its efforts to get rid of the negative consequences of the developments in the Middle East, making the Turkey-centric approach increasingly congruent with westernism. That the Arab countries have somehow lost their ability to help shape the regional developments in the post-Saddam era has also strengthened Turkey's agency in the Middle East. Since the regime change in Iraq, non-Arab countries have been on the rise in the region. Iran and Turkey appear to have gained the most from the emerging power vacuum in the post-Saddam Iraq.

³⁸ The "axis of moderation" is a term that denotes the US-oriented Sunni regimes in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. These are mainly authoritarian regimes that also view the rise of Shiite influence in the Middle East through alarmed eyes. The "axis of evil" is the term that is coined by the Bush administration to denote the close cooperation among Iran, Syria, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

CONCLUSION

This study has argued that Turkey's approach towards the western actors has recently evolved into Turkey-centric westernism. Exogenous factors at the systemic and regional levels on the one hand, and Turkey's increasing power capabilities as well as the penetration of the strategic-depth doctrine into Turkey's body politic on the other, appear to have played the most decisive roles in this process. Systemic and regional factors have contributed to Turkey's capability to maneuver in its neighbourhood and have also led Ankara to scrutinize the foundations of Turkey's traditional relations with the western actors.

Turkey's relationship with western actors has gradually transformed into one of pragmatic and strategic cooperation based on common interests from what it used to be—a strong alliance based on common enemies and values. Another conclusion is that despite the fact that Turkey's approach towards the west has changed in a more pragmatic and interest-based fashion, Turkey's foreign policy understanding and practices have increasingly become more European and western than ever. Not only has Turkey's transformation alongside western and European norms continued unabated, but it has increasingly begun to act as a typical western or European country in its foreign policies, particularly in the Middle East. However, this is not to say that the Europeanization and westernization of Turkish foreign policy have been caused by Turkey's desire to prove its European/western identity. Instead, *realpolitik* concerns have played more decisive roles in this outcome.

As long as acting European and western in foreign policy pays off, this will continue. This is also why it would be inaccurate to point to Turkey's increasing involvement in the Middle East and the concomitant adoption of Turkey-centric westernism as a sign of Turkey's estrangement from the west.